

3:24-mj-00115

**Affidavit in Support of a Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant**

I, Clinton Lindsly, being duly sworn, do hereby depose and state as follows:

## **Introduction and Agent Background**

1. I have been employed as a Special Agent (SA) by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) since August 2010. I am currently assigned to the child exploitation unit in the HSI office in Portland, Oregon. Previously, I was assigned to the HSI office in Los Angeles, California, where I worked for over six years in a money laundering and narcotics group that specialized in undercover operations. In 2018, I transferred to HSI Portland and continued to specialize in money laundering and narcotics investigations until January 2020. My formal law enforcement training includes successfully completing the 23-week HSI basic training course at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia. During that training, I learned how to conduct child exploitation investigations. Since then, I have been involved in many child exploitation investigations and have assisted federal and state partners during their investigations. As such, I have become familiar with ways that child pornography is shared, distributed, and/or produced, including the use of various social media websites (Facebook, Twitter, Kik, Snap Chat, Discord, Telegram, etc.), “cloud” based storage, and peer-to-peer (P2P) networks. Often, individuals involved in child exploitation will collect or store images and/or videos on various media devices they keep at their residences, or in offsite locations such as “cloud” based storage. I have also become familiar with jargon or slang terms that people involved in child exploitation will use to discuss their activities.

2. I have worked with agents involved in numerous investigations involving the sexual exploitation of children or the distribution, receipt, and possession of child pornography. I have participated in searches of premises and assisted in gathering evidence pursuant to search warrants, including search warrants in multiple child pornography investigations. I have participated in interviews of persons who possess and distribute child pornography.

3. I have participated in online undercover communications using messaging platforms with hundreds of people interested in the production, distribution, and receipt of child pornography. In my undercover role I have assisted in the administration of private chat groups dedicated to the production, distribution, and receipt of child pornography. As such, I have become familiar with platforms used to facilitate the production, distribution, and receipt of child pornography and their purposes.

4. I submit this affidavit in support of a criminal complaint and arrest warrant for **Steven Worth ELLIS**, for violations of *18 U.S.C § 2251(a) and (e)* – Attempted Sexual Exploitation of Children, *18 U.S.C § 2422(b)* – Coercion and Enticement of a Minor, and *18 U.S. Code § 2423(b)* – Travel With Intent To Engage in Illicit Sexual Conduct, referred to as the “**Target Offenses**.**”** As set forth below, I have probable cause to believe that **ELLIS** committed the **Target Offenses** between at least May 1, 2024, to June 5, 2024.

5. This affidavit is intended to show only that there is sufficient probable cause for the requested warrant and does not set forth all my knowledge about this matter. The facts set forth in this affidavit are based on my own personal knowledge, knowledge obtained from other individuals during my participation in this investigation, including other law enforcement officers, a review of records related to this investigation, communications with others who have

knowledge of the events and circumstances described herein, and information gained through my training and experience.

**Applicable Law**

6. *Title 18, United States Code, § 2251(a) and (e)* makes it a crime for any person to employ, use, persuade, induce, entice, or coerce any minor to engage in any sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or for the purpose of transmitting a live visual depiction of such conduct, or to attempt to do so, if such person knows or has reason to know that the visual depiction will be transported or transmitted using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce or mailed, if the visual depiction was produced or transmitted using materials that have been mailed, shipped, or transported in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce by any means, including by computer, or if the visual depiction has actually been transported or transmitted using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce or mailed.

7. *Title 18, United States Code § 2422(b)* makes it a crime for any person to use the mail or any facility or means of interstate or foreign commerce to knowingly persuade, induce, entice, or coerce any individual who has not attained the age of 18 years to engage in any sexual activity for which any person can be charged with a criminal offense, or to attempt to do so.

8. *Title 18 United States Code § 2423(b)* makes it a crime for any person travel in interstate commerce with a motivating purpose of engaging in any illicit sexual conduct with another person.

9. The term “child pornography” is defined in 18 U.S.C. § 2256(8). “Child pornography,” as defined in 18 U.S.C. § 2256(8), includes any visual depiction of a child under

the age of 18 years engaging in sexually explicit conduct. “Sexually explicit conduct” is defined in 18 U.S.C. § 2256(2) and includes sexual intercourse, whether genital-genital, oral-genital, anal-genital, or oral-anal, whether between members of the same or opposite sex; bestiality; masturbation; sadistic or masochistic abuse; and the lascivious exhibition of the genitals, anus, or pubic area of any person.

**Statement of Probable Cause**

**DHS Screening Report Identifies Steven ELLIS**

10. On June 4, 2024, I was contacted by Portland Police Bureau Police Bureau (PPB) regarding an adult male traveling to Oregon to have sex with a 15-year-old minor. In summary, on May 31, 2024, a tipster contacted the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) to report that an individual identified as **Steven ELLIS** was engaged in an online sexual relationship with a 15-year-old female child (hereinafter “Minor Victim” or “MV”). It was reported that **ELLIS** met MV on the social media platform “Reddit” and that they had been in constant communication with each other for the past month. MV and **ELLIS** were also reported to be sending nude photographs and sexual messages to each other. **ELLIS** told MV that he wanted to marry her and “come get her.” **ELLIS** was supposed to drive to Oregon to meet up with MV, was renting an Airbnb, and was due to arrive in Oregon on June 5, 2024. **ELLIS** was reported to be driving a blue BMW (i.e., the **Subject Vehicle**) and was using phone number 520-280-2019 (**Subject Phone**). The tip was assigned DHS Screen Report #3753444.

11. Based on the above information, I conducted law enforcement inquiries and identified that **ELLIS** had Texas Driver License #XXX6570, that he resided at 832 Independence Circle in Presidio, Texas 79845 (**ELLIS’ residence**), and that he was a United

States citizen. During a review of his passport application, I learned that **ELLIS** had reported his phone number as 520-280-2019 (**Subject Phone**).

12. I also learned that HSI Presidio (Texas) had an active investigation involving **ELLIS** related to child pornography. Specifically, in December 2020, investigators identified an IP address that was downloading suspected child pornography that resolved to 832 Independence Circle in Presidio, Texas 79845 (**ELLIS'** residence). **ELLIS** was identified to reside at this address during the time period of the suspected downloads of child pornography.

13. In December 2021, investigators executed a federal search warrant at **ELLIS'** residence and seized numerous digital devices. This warrant was assigned case number PE:21-M-1183.

14. After the search warrant, **ELLIS** agreed to be interviewed. However, after being advised of his *Miranda* rights, **ELLIS** declined to provide any statements. During a forensic review of the seized devices, over 1,500 media files of child pornography were located. **ELLIS** has not been charged yet based on the above investigation

15. Based on the above information and suspecting that MV was in immediate danger of being kidnapped and/or sexually assaulted, I submitted an exigent request to Airbnb for any recent reservations made by **ELLIS**. Pursuant to this request, I learned that **ELLIS** had a standing reservation for a residence located within miles of MV's residence in Portland, Oregon, with a check-in date of June 6, 2024 (3 p.m.). The reservation was for five nights. Additionally, Airbnb provided the last IP activity on **ELLIS'** account, which was on June 1, 2024, from an IP address that resolved to Presidio, Texas.

16. At approximately 9:45 a.m., I and other investigators went and met with MV's parents. During this meeting, the parents stated that they had not made MV aware of the DHS

information yet and that they were willing to assist law enforcement. I learned that MV had several digital devices including a Google Pixel cell phone, a tablet, and a Chromebook. The parents stated that they purchased all the devices and that they pay for the devices' monthly fees if applicable. The parents explained that MV had a GPS monitoring application on her cell phone but that she had a history of turning it on and off. Additionally, the parents stated that they had a "contract" with their daughter related to the digital devices and that MV was aware that they could search those devices at any time. When asked what social media platforms MV was currently using, the parents stated that MV was on Discord, Reddit, Instagram, and X Corp. Prior to leaving, I requested the parents to conduct a covert review of MV's cell phone or Chromebook to see if there were any messages involving **ELLIS** if afforded the opportunity.

17. Suspecting that MV was in immediate danger of being kidnapped and/or sexually assaulted, I also submitted an exigent request to Verizon Wireless for real-time location data and other data for phone number 520-280-2019 (**Subject Phone**). The request for real-time location data was for 48 hours and is set to expire on June 6, 2024, at approximately 11:00 a.m.

18. At approximately 10:58 a.m., I began to receive real-time location data for the **Subject Phone** in 15-minute intervals. The **Subject Phone** appeared to be located in Presidio, Texas near **ELLIS'** residence. Investigators then conducted surveillance at **ELLIS'** residence and observed the **Subject Vehicle** parked in front.

19. At approximately 2:00 p.m., I contacted the host/owner of the Airbnb property rented by **ELLIS** in Portland, Oregon. I identified myself as a Special Agent with Homeland Security Investigations and informed him that his rental property in Portland had come up in an investigation related to the sexual exploitation of children. The owner confirmed that he in fact had a reservation commencing on June 6, 2024, for an individual identified as "Steven Ellis"

(ELLIS) with phone number 520-280-2019 (**Subject Phone**). The owner stated that he would be willing to assist law enforcement and would attempt to contact **ELLIS** via the Airbnb platform to see if he (**ELLIS**) would confirm his reservation.

20. At approximately 4:40 p.m., I contacted the tipster who called and reported the information under DHS Screening Report #3753444. In summary, I learned that the tipster was in fact a friend of MV's and had firsthand knowledge of the reported information. Additionally, the tipster stated that MV was also standing next to them when they called the DHS tipline and that MV provided some of the information while on the call. The tipster stated that MV specifically told her that MV and **ELLIS** were planning to have sex if they met up. The tipster stated that she is pretty sure that **ELLIS** knows MV is a minor.

21. When asked how they were continuing to communicate, the tipster stated that they were communicating on Discord but would not be surprised if they were texting as well. The tipster stated that they have personally seen the messages on Discord between MV and **ELLIS** and that MV has Discord on her Google Pixel phone and her Chromebook. The tipster stated that MV does not erase her messages because they have seen MV scroll through all her messages with **ELLIS** before. The tipster stated that MV had shown them pictures of **ELLIS**. **ELLIS** was described as a white middle-aged male, medium build, grey hair, and with a beard. The tipster stated that MV believed that **ELLIS** was 49 years old and that his birthday was on December 3 (i.e., **ELLIS** actual month and date of birth). In fact, **ELLIS** is approximately 62 years old.

22. The tipster explained that they have not specifically seen any of the sexually explicit videos sent back and forth between MV and **ELLIS**, but MV has told them that they have exchanged fully nude photographs. When asked how they knew **ELLIS'** phone number,

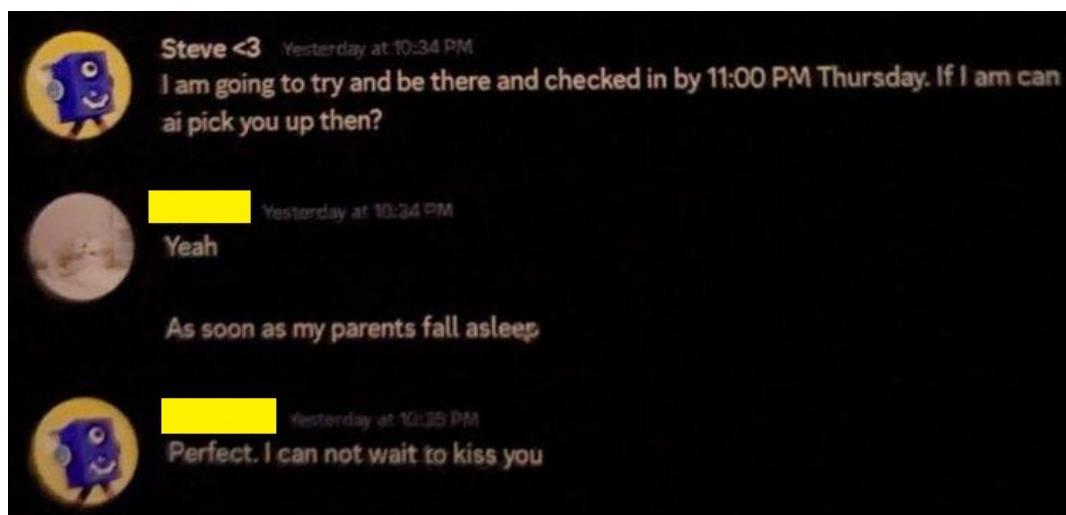
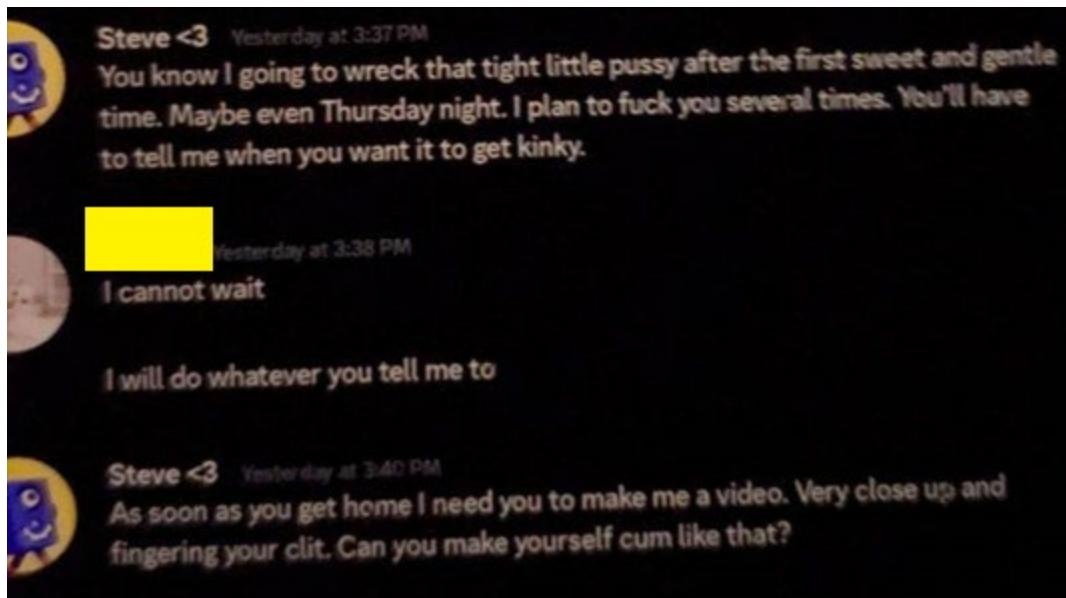
the tipster stated that during the DHS call they read the phone number from MV's phone and that it was saved in her phone as a contact. The tipster stated that MV said that her and **ELLIS** were going to get married when she turned 18. The tipster stated that **ELLIS** was initially supposed to meet MV on his return trip from Australia last week but was going to be driving now. When asked what MV's plan was to meet up with **ELLIS**, the tipster explained that MV really did not have a plan, that she thought maybe they would meet up on a weekend, and that MV stated that **ELLIS** would be staying close enough where she could walk to meet him. The tipster stated that MV claimed that MV is the only minor that **ELLIS** is communicating with.

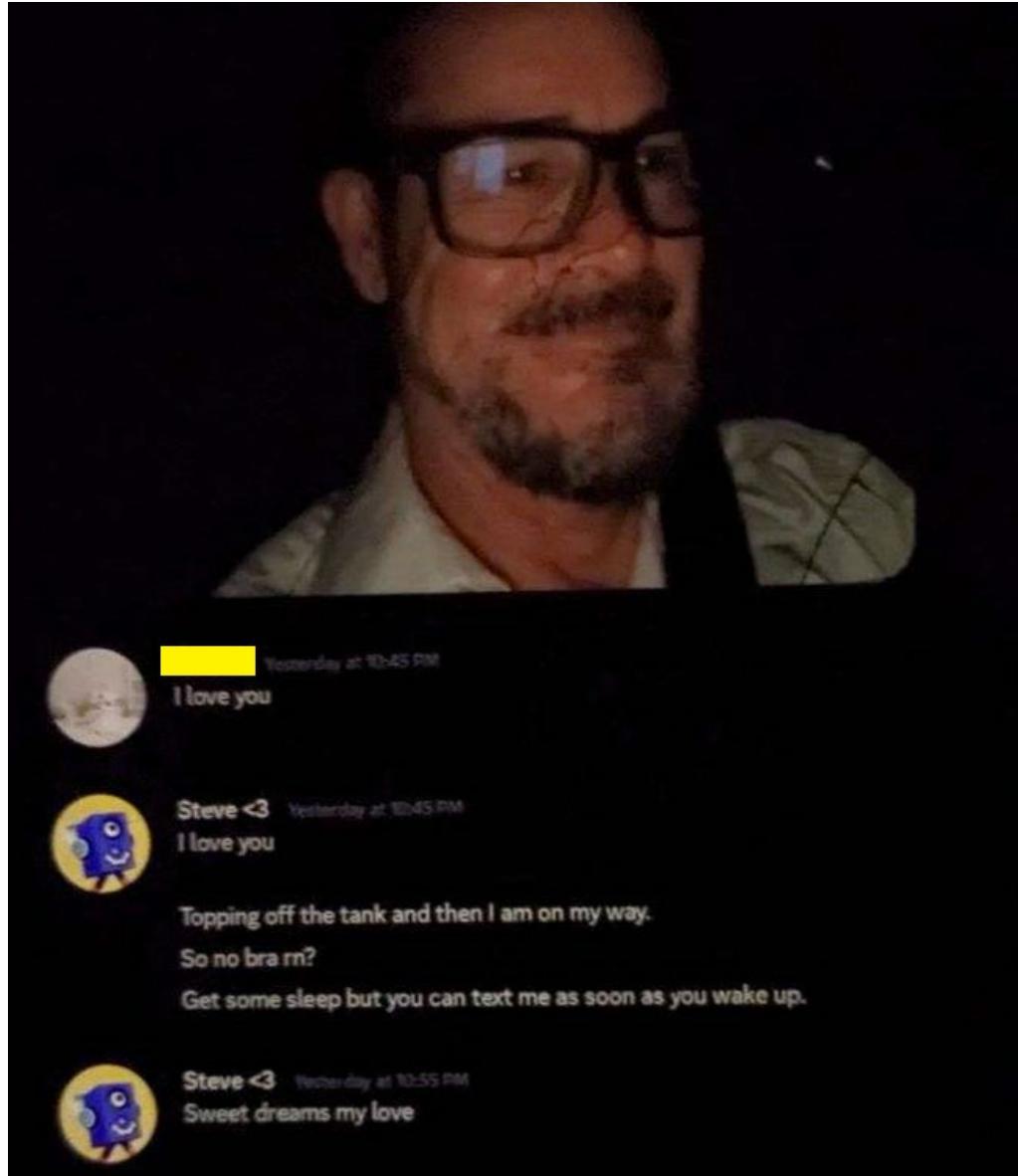
23. On June 5, 2024, MV's parents advised that they had conducted a covert review of MV's cell phone and located suspected communications with **ELLIS** via Discord. The parents were able to take pictures of several of the chat messages and provided those to me for review. In summary, the chat messages indicated that **ELLIS** was leaving Presidio, Texas to meet up with MV. **ELLIS** stated that he was going to have sex with MV and asked MV to produce a sexually explicit video.<sup>1</sup> **ELLIS** expressed that he loved MV and that they were going to get married. **ELLIS** sent a selfie-style picture of himself. I have provided excerpts of some of the messages below for the Court:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MV replied that she was not able to record the video as requested because she was not going to be at home.

<sup>2</sup> The username and identifying information of MV has been redacted.





24. At approximately 7:36 a.m., the owner of the Airbnb in Portland contacted me. In summary, the owner stated that **ELLIS** had confirmed his reservation via the Airbnb portal and that **ELLIS** wrote “Confirming...And looking forward to it.”

25. After learning the above information, investigators in Presidio, Texas drove by **ELLIS'** residence and observed that the **Subject Vehicle** was no longer parked at the residence. This is consistent with **ELLIS** driving the **Subject Vehicle** to Oregon to meet with MV.

26. Throughout the morning and early afternoon of June 5, 2024, I reviewed the geolocation data for the **Subject Phone** provided by Verizon Wireless. The geolocation data showed the **Subject Phone** departing Presidio, Texas at approximately 11 p.m. on June 4, 2024. The **Subject Phone** is moving quickly along a route in a northwest direction consistent with driving nonstop in the direction of Oregon. At 1:45 pm on June 5, 2024, the **Subject Phone** appeared to be passing through Salt Lake City, Utah. By 7 p.m., the **Subject Phone** had reached Idaho.

27. Based on the path and rate of travel of the **Subject Phone**, **ELLIS** is anticipated to arrive in Portland, Oregon at approximately 6 a.m. on June 6, 2024.

28. Based on the above facts, I believe that **ELLIS** has committed the **Target Offenses**.

**Request for Sealing**

29. I further request that the Court issue an order sealing, until further order of the Court, all papers submitted in support of the requested arrest warrant, including the application, this affidavit, the attachments, and the requested criminal complaint. I believe that sealing these documents is necessary because the information to be seized is relevant to an ongoing investigation, and any disclosure of the information at this time may cause flight from prosecution, destruction of or tampering with evidence, or otherwise seriously jeopardize this investigation. Premature disclosure of the contents of the application, this affidavit, the attachments, and the requested criminal complaint may adversely affect the integrity of the investigation.

**Conclusion**

30. Based on the foregoing, I have probable cause to believe that **Steven Worth ELLIS** committed violations of *18 U.S.C § 2251(a) and (e)* – Attempted Sexual Exploitation of Children, *18 U.S.C § 2422(b)* – Coercion and Enticement of a Minor, and *18 U.S. Code § 2423(b)* – Travel With Intent To Engage in Illicit Sexual Conduct (**Target Offenses**). I therefore respectfully request that the Court issue a criminal complaint and arrest warrant charging **ELLIS** with these offenses.

31. Prior to being submitted to the Court, this affidavit, the accompanying application, and the requested arrest warrant were all reviewed by Assistant United States Attorney (AUSA) Mira Chernick. AUSA Chernick advised me that in her opinion, the affidavit and application are legally and factually sufficient to establish probable cause to support the issuance of the requested warrant.

(By telephone)  
CLINTON LINDSLY  
Special Agent  
Homeland Security Investigations

Sworn to before me telephonically or by other reliable means pursuant to Fed. R. Crim. P. 4.1 at 9:05 ~~am~~/pm on June 5, 2024.

  
HONORABLE JOLIE A. RUSSO  
United States Magistrate Judge